



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Review Conference Warsaw, 6 October 2010

EU Statement – Session 7: Tolerance and non-discrimination I (2)

Dear Mr. Moderator

I am honoured to speak on behalf of the European Union.

The European Union attaches great importance to promoting the rights of persons belonging to national minorities as well as preventing aggressive nationalism, racism and chauvinism, and reiterates its full support for the advancement of dialogue, mutual respect and understanding throughout the OSCE region.

Appreciation for diversity as well as understanding between individuals, communities and societies cannot be achieved without respect of human rights. All members of our societies must be equally protected against discrimination and equally treated, irrespective of their racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, sex, disability, sexual orientation or age. Discrimination against persons belonging to national minorities should be tackled in all its forms and aspects and our actions in this respect should be based on sound integration policies.

The EU appreciates the attention given by the Kazakhstan's OSCE Chairmanship to the matters of tolerance and non-discrimination. The High-Level Conference organized in Astana earlier this year provided an excellent opportunity to share positive experiences and best practices in promoting tolerance and non-discrimination.

Sadly, despite our common efforts discrimination is still widespread in the OSCE area, and the EU member states are not free of this problem. Reports about infringements of rights of persons belonging to minorities and racist incidents of an increasingly violent nature show a worrying tendency across the OSCE region. The current world economic crisis could be an additional factor contributing to the rise of mistrust, frictions and xenophobia within our societies. We must make further efforts in order to face the existing and emerging challenges.

Any ethnic tensions can have a direct impact on the security situation in the OSCE area. Therefore, the issue of minorities is a matter of great importance that requires our constant vigilance. Unfortunately, problems stemming from lack of respect of the rights of persons belonging to minorities remain numerous and persistent, and ethnic tensions can appear anywhere. The recent conflict in Kyrgyzstan is a bitter reminder that stability is not granted for ever and constant efforts are needed to minimize the risk and avoid the reoccurrence of conflicts based on minority issues in the OSCE region. In this respect, the work done by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities is as important as ever.

The EU supports and highly values all activities of the HCNM, including the holding of several round table conferences on the Bolzano-Bozen recommendations, and is fully convinced that Ambassador Knut Vollebaek's second term in office will be marked by the continued outstanding work done by the Commissioner. The EU calls on all OSCE participating States to continue to co-operate with the HCNM on all matters related to national minorities and make full use of his assistance and expertise.

The EU also highly values and supports ODIHR's work in the field of tolerance and non-discrimination and calls on OSCE participating States to actively cooperate with the Office on these matters. In addition, the EU supports coordination of efforts in this area with other relevant international organizations, such as the Council of Europe and the United Nations and its Alliance of Civilizations initiative. Furthermore, the EU is convinced that non-governmental organizations play an important role in promoting tolerance and rising awareness of rights of persons belonging to minorities.

The EU believes that education plays a very important role in promoting mutual understanding, integration and respect for diversity. Only by ensuring that all members of our societies have equal opportunities we can provide for a thriving and cohesive OSCE area. And equal opportunities can be assured only if everyone has access to education. In this regard, the EU appreciates the July SHDM focusing on the issue of education of national minorities.

The Review Conference gives an excellent opportunity to take stock and further advance implementation of OSCE commitments, also those related to the promotion of the rights of persons belonging to minorities and aimed at curbing aggressive nationalism, racism and chauvinism. The focus on implementation is crucial, because even best laws are useless if they are not observed. It is vital to ensure that our common commitments are observed and that the lofty ideal of the OSCE area as a region of peaceful coexistence and security for all is not an empty notion, but comes true.

Thank you for your attention.

The candidate countries TURKEY, CROATIA*, the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA* and ICELAND**, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, MONTENEGRO and SERBIA, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, ARMENIA, GEORGIA, and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

*Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

** Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and the European Economic Area.